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MICAJAH AUTRY, A SOLDIER OF THE ALAMO

ADÉLE B. LOOSCAN

Near the entrance to the Capitol at Austin, there stands a monument erected by the state of Texas to the memory of the men who fell in the Alamo. The names thereon engraved are read with reverential feeling, suggesting as they do a picture of sublime self-sacrifice, of lives offered up willingly, that "Texas might have breathing time." These names are arranged in alphabetical order, and that of Micajah Autry, a native of North Carolina, stands among the first.

From his only daughter, Mrs. Mary Autry Greer, of Beaumont, Texas, I have learned some incidents of the life and some traits of the character of this man whose name is ineffaceably traced on the graven tablet and indelibly written on the pages of Texas history. Through the courtesy of Judge James L. Autry, his grandson, I have had the privilege of reading copies of letters written by him to his wife Martha, while on his journey from Tennessee to Texas. I have used such extracts from these as seem best to describe the men whom he met and the trials and the hardships which encompassed him, as well as the ardent hope and fervor of purpose which enabled him without faltering to persevere throughout this fateful last journey. The muster roll, dated Nacogdoches, January 14, 1836, and containing for the most part the names of Tennesseans, forms a kind of sequel to the last letter written by Autry to his wife from the same place. The newspaper obituary published after his death may not be perfectly accurate in all its details, yet it agrees in its main features with family tradition. The hastily written note of Nat G. Smith, without date, portrays vividly the anxiety which filled the hearts of devoted relatives, awaiting with mingled hope and dread the news to be gathered from passengers on the stage coaches. Such documents need little comment from the compiler; they reflect the character of the times, and, more forcibly still, the character of the gentleman, the affectionate husband and father, the patriot, soldier, and hero who is the subject of this sketch.

Micajah Autry was born near the close of the eighteenth century, about 1794 or 1795. Some interesting data are contained in the following obituary notice, published soon after his death, in a North Carolina newspaper:¹

Major Micajah Autry—We have received a letter from Tennessee informing us that this gentleman was one of the gallant volunteers who fell at the storming of the Alamo, in San Antonio, Texas. He was a native of Sampson County, in this State, but from the age of six years until the year 1823, when he was about 28 years of age, he resided in this County with his father, Mr. Theophilus Autry. Between the ages of 17 and 18, he volunteered in Captain Lord's Company, and marched to Wilmington, when the place was threatened by the British. He afterwards joined the army at Charleston, and remained in the service until the peace in the Spring of 1815.¹

On his return in consequence of bad health, which prevented his labouring on the farm, he directed his attention to literary pursuits, and soon qualified himself for teaching. In 1823 he moved to Hayesboro, Tenn. Here he studied law and was admitted to the bar at Nashville in 1828 or '9. In 1831 he removed to Jackson, in the Western District of Tennessee where he practised law until November last, when he volunteered in the cause of Texas. He met death in the glorious battle of San Antonio, the particulars of which are too well known to need repetition. He has left a wife and two children in Tennessee, and his aged father and other relatives in this County.

Mrs. Greer says that after moving to Tennessee her father taught school, while studying law, and that about the year 1824 he was united in marriage to Mrs. Martha Wyche Wilkinson, whose maiden name was Putney. This lady was the widow of Dr. Wilkinson, to whom she had borne one child, a daughter named Amelia. For several years the home of Mr. Autry lay within a few miles of Nashville, near which city was also the home of Andrew Jackson, "The Hermitage." Here several children were born, of whom only two, Mary and James L. Autry, grew to maturity. The account of the removal of the family from Nashville to Jackson is here given in the words of his daughter, who was old enough to remember distinctly the incidents of their overland journey.

¹The Treaty of Ghent was ratified February 17, 1815.

²This notice is contained in a clipping which the family has preserved. There is no record of the name or date of the paper from which it is taken.

Mother, Sister, Aunt, my baby brother, his nurse and myself travelled in the family coach, a handsome affair drawn by two large bays. Father rode a fine grey horse, and was an agile, graceful equestrian. The slaves were in two immense wagons, with hoops covered with cloth, not unlike in appearance the large automobiles of the present day, and drawn by horses or mules. Although so young I remember several incidents of the route. One was this: late one evening father dashed up to the coach, saying to the coachman, "Drive for your life! We must reach a house some miles distant. It is said there is a large pack of wolves but a few miles off!" And as he dashed away to warn the wagoners we heard the distant howl of the wolves. We reached the house, however, and were entertained hospitably. The negroes in the wagons always camped out and cooked their own meals. In a few days more we reached our destination, the flourishing little town of Jackson. My father had visited the country some months before, bought several acres of land in the suburbs on a high hill level at the top for many feet and built a hewn log house of four large rooms and a wide hall. Such residences were common throughout the South in pioneer days and were neat and comfortable.

At Jackson Mr. Autry formed a law partnership with Andrew L. Martin, a talented attorney of prominence. They had a large practice, but made the mistake of engaging also in mercantile business, which proved unsuccessful. In its interest Mr. Autry made two trips to Philadelphia and New York to purchase stocks of dry goods, and on one of these occasions heard much talk of Texas. He determined to visit Texas and determine for himself its advantages as a place of residence for his family, and in 1835 he set out on his long and fateful journey. Meanwhile Amelia Wilkinson, Mrs. Autry's oldest daughter, who had been married when quite young to Samuel Smith, a wealthy planter, offered to share her home with her mother and the two little children until a new home should be prepared for them in Texas. Mr. Smith kindly guarded their interests, sold their home, furniture, carriage and horses, and gave work to their slaves.

Autry's letters to his wife tell of his journey. In a letter dated Memphis, Tennessee, December 7, 1835, he says:

I have taken my passage in the steamboat Pacific and shall leave in an hour or two. . . . I have met in the same boat a number of acquaintances from Nashville and the District, bound for Texas, among whom are George C. Childress and his brother. Childress

thinks the fighting will be over before we get there, and speaks cheerfully of the prospects. I feel more energy than I ever did in anything I have undertaken. I am determined to provide for you a home or perish. . . . Fare you all well till you hear from me again, perhaps from Natchez. . . .

[In a letter written from Nachitoches, December 13, 1835, he says:]

About 20 minutes ago I landed at this place safely after considerable peril. About 20 men from Tennessee formed our squad at Memphis, and all landed safely at the mouth of Red River. Major Eaton and Lady were on board the Pacific, to whom I suppose I was favourably introduced by Mr. Childress, from that however or from some other reason Gov. Eaton paid me the most friendly and assiduous attention. . . . I have not met with a more amiable and agreeable man than the Governor. By his persuasion a Major Arnold from Tennessee (a cousin of Gen'l Arnold) and myself left the rest of our Company at the mouth of Red River and went down to Orleans for the purpose of learning the true state of things in Texas as well as which would be the best probable rout. The result was that, the war is still going on favourably to the Texans, but it is thought that Santa Anna will make a descent with his whole forces in the Spring, but there will be soldiers enough of the real grit in Texas by that time to overrun all Mexico.

The only danger is in starvation, for the impulse to Texas both as to soldiers and moving families exceeds anything I have ever known. I have little doubt but that the army will receive ample supplies from Orleans both of provisions and munitions of war, as the people of Texas have formed themselves into something like a government, which will give them credit in Orleans. I have had many glowing descriptions of the country by those who have been there. . . . We have between 400 and 500 miles to foot it to the seat of government, for we cannot get horses, but we have sworn allegiance to each other and will get along somehow. . . . The smallpox has recently broken out here very bad, but I fear the Tavern bill a great deal worse. Such charges never were heard of and we have to stay here probably several days before we can procure a conveyance for our baggage. I suppose we shall join and buy a waggon.

Write to me to this place all the letters you send by mail, perhaps the general intercourse from here to Texas, will enable me to get them conveniently. Write me in Texas by every private opportunity, and I will do the same. . . . I send this by Mr. Sevier who promises to put it in the postoffice at Bolivar or Middleburg. . . .

P. S. The Company of young men that left Jackson before I

did passed through here about 20 days ago. [He mentions the name of Charles Haskell as having been among these, who had all gone on to "St Antone" the seat of war.]

Pursuing the course of Micajah Autry by means of these letters, it appears that he had not overestimated the difficulties that would beset his path on the way to Texas. In the last letter received by his wife he writes as follows :

Nacogdoches, Jany. 13th, 1836.

My Dear Martha,

I have reached this point after many hardships and privations but thank God in most excellent health. The very great fatigue I have suffered has in a degree stifled reflection and has been an advantage to me. I walked from Nachitoches whence I wrote you last to this place 115 miles through torrents of rain, mud and water. I had remained a few days in St. Augustine when Capt. Kimble from Clarksvelle, Ten. a lawyer of whom you may recollect to have heard me speak arrived with a small company of select men, 4 of them lawyers. I joined them and find them perfect gentlemen. We are waiting for a company daily expected from Columbia, Ten. under Col. Hill with whom we expect to march to head quarters (Washington) 125 miles from here, where we shall join Houston the commander in chief and receive our destination. I may or may not receive promotion as there are many very meritorious men seeking the same. I have become one of the most thorough going men you ever heard of. I go the whole Hog in the cause of Texas. I expect to help them gain their independence and also to form their civil government, for it is worth risking many lives for. From what I have seen and learned from others there is not so fair a portion of the earth's surface warmed by the sun.

Be of good cheer Martha I will provide you a sweet home. I shall be entitled to 640 acres of land for my services in the army and 4444 acres upon condition of settling my family here. Whether I shall be able to move you here next fall or not will depend upon the termination of the present contest. Some say that Santa Ana is in the field with an immense army and near the confines of Texas, others say since the conquest of St. Antonio by the Texians and the imprisonment of Genl. Cos and 1100 men of which you have no doubt heard, that Santa Ana has become intimidated for fear that the Texians will drive the war into his dominions and is now holding himself in readiness to fly to Europe which latter report I am inclined to discredit, what is the truth of the matter no one here knows or pretends to know.

Tell Mr. Smith not to think of remaining where he is but to be

ready to come to this country at the very moment the government shall be settled, as for a trifle he may procure a possession of land that will make a fortune for himself, his children and his children's children of its own increase in value and such a cotton country is not under the sun. I have just been introduced to Mr. McNiell a nephew of Mr. S. who is now in this place and appears to be much of a gentleman. Give my most kind affection to Amelia and Mr. Smith and to my own Dear Mary and James give a thousand tender embraces and for you my Dearest Martha may the smile of heaven keep you as happy as possible till we meet.

M. Autry.

Tell Brothers J. & S. I have not time to write to them at present as Mr. Madding and Sevier by whom I send this can not wait. Tell Brother Jack to think of nothing but coming here with us; that if he knew as much about this country as I already do he would not be kept from it. Tell him to study law as this will be the greatest country for that profession as soon as we have a government that ever was known.

M. A.

P. S. We stand guard of nights and night before last was mine to stand two hours during which the moon rose in all her mildness but splendor and majesty. With what pleasure did I contemplate that lovely orb chiefly because I recollected how often you and I had taken pleasure in standing in the door and contemplating her together. Indeed I imagined that you might be looking at her at the same time. Farewell Dear Martha.

M. A.

P. S. Col. Crockett has just joined our company.¹

The following copy of a muster roll shows some of the companions with whom Autry left Nacogdoches.²

Know all men by these presents: That I have this day voluntarily enlisted myself in the Volunteer Auxiliary Corps, for and during the term of six months.

And I do solemnly swear that I will bear true allegiance to the provisional Government of Texas, or any future Government that may be hereafter declared, and that I will serve her honestly and faithfully against all her enemies whatsoever and observe and obey the orders of the Governor of Texas, the orders and decrees of the present and future authorities and the orders of the officers ap-

¹This letter was addressed to Mrs. Martha W. Autry, Middleburg, Harde-man Cty., Tennessee.

²It is obtained from a copy in the General Land Office (Muster Rolls of the War with Mexico, p. 117). The original roll was destroyed by fire in the burning of the adjutant general's office in 1855.

pointed over me according to the rules and regulations for the government of the Armies of Texas. "So help me God."

Nacogdoches, January 14th 1836.

Names.	Age.	Remarks.
H. S. Kimble	31	Tennessee.
M. Autley [Autry] ¹	43	Tennessee.
J. P. Bailey	24	Kentucky.
Daniel W. Cloud	21	Kentucky.
W. J. Lewis	28	Pennsylvania.
Wm. H. Furtleroy	23	Kentucky.
B. M. Thomas	18	Tennessee.
R. L. Stockton	18	Virginia.
Robert Bowen	24	Tennessee.
J. E. Massie	24	Tennessee.
Wm. McDowell	40	Tennessee.
John P. Raynolds	29	Tennessee.
Joseph Bayliss	28	Tennessee.

The above sworn to and subscribed before me, this 14th January, 1836.

John Forbes

1st Judge of the Municipality of Nacogdoches.

It would be very interesting to know how this little party of patriots marched to San Antonio. But history is as yet silent upon that point. From a letter written from Bexar on February 11, 1836, by G. B. Jameson we learn that the Texans had on that date at Bexar one hundred and fifty men, and that Colonels Crockett and Travis were there, and that Colonel Bowie was in command of the volunteers. It is probable that Autry and his companions arrived at about the same time as Crockett, and that within the space of about twenty-five days they had traversed that wide area of almost uninhabited territory which separated Nacogdoches from their destination. Did the Tennesseans do as Major Autry suggested they might: "join together and buy a waggon for their baggage" and march on foot that long distance, or were they fortunate enough to get horses? They had enlisted at Nacogdoches in the Volunteer Auxiliary Corps for six months and had sworn

¹Partly on the evidence of this muster roll the heirs of Autry were granted a land donation. This name was thought to be a copyist's mistake for "Autry." The age, "43," does not agree with the statement above that he was born in 1794 or 1795, but that statement purports to give only an approximate date.—EDITORS OF THE QUARTERLY.

allegiance to the government of Texas and to EACH OTHER. Right nobly did they keep their word! The copy of this muster roll contains the last mention of the devoted band until the names of all but three of them were inscribed on the imperishable roll of history as heroes of the Alamo. The interval between January 14 and March 6, 1836, was full of tragedy for them. The long, tortuous, muddy, often almost impassable trail, called at the time the "old San Antonio road," no doubt received its heavy toll of death, and the graves of many brave men lie unknown and unmarked along its length. Probably the three who did not have the privilege of dying with their comrades in the Alamo, laid down their lives by the roadside, and their sacrifice will remain unrecorded and unsung.

There is in Micajah Autry's family a brief note written by Nat G. Smith to Mrs. Amelia W. Smith, in response to her anxious inquiries as to the fate of her stepfather. It bears no date, but was probably written in April or May of 1836. It reads as follows:

Dear Sister:

In reply to your inquiries, I went to the Tavern as soon as I understood the stage had arrived with passengers from Texas, and found Col. Thomas K. Hill of Columbia, surrounded by a crowd, all asking after friends etc. I passed through to him and got an introduction and asked him if he knew Maj. Autry personally; he replied he did not. I asked him if he thought he was certainly killed; he said he had no doubt of it. Mr. Henderson, who accompanied Col. Hill, said, there was no doubt of Maj. Autry's death, he also stated that young Mr. Haskell was certainly killed with Fanning, and that his brother young Mr. Henderson and Mr. Jones would both be at home in a few days (there were two young Hendersons). My informant stated they had conversed with a Mrs. Travis and the servants,¹ and it all was confirmed. None of them surrendered they fought to the last.

Yours &c

Nat G. Smith.

The absence of a regular mail service from Texas to the United States made the arrival of passengers in the stage an event of the

¹The reference to Mrs. Travis and the servants is probably a mistake; it is likely that he means Mrs. Dickinson and Travis's negro servant who were spared by Santa Anna and brought to the Texans the first authentic news of the fall of the Alamo.

utmost importance. Letters were usually transmitted by the favor of passengers, and news from Texas was eagerly awaited at every town through which they passed. Rumor had preceded any authentic statements as to the result of the battles in which the brave volunteers had been engaged, and their friends looked forward hopefully to a possible contradiction of the terrible news so widely spread.

Mrs. Mary Autry Greer in writing her recollections of her father, and of the relatives with whom her mother and children were living says:

We lived with them till the awful news of father's death came to us one lovely April morning, when snowy white dogwood blossoms and the red bud trees spotted the tender green of the forest that surrounded the house. My little playmate and I were striving to gather the lovely white and pink flowers by throwing up sticks for them, when a voice near us said to me: "You must come to the house. Your father has been killed, and your mother half dead with the news." Breathless I ran, and was greeted with choking sobs as she tried to tell me the tragic news. Father's last letter, (we have it still,) was from Nacogdoches. His companion en route was the celebrated Tennessee orator; Davy Crockett, who proved in deeds his famous motto: "Be sure you are right, then go ahead!" They fell near each other in the sublime holocaust of the Alamo. Neither of them, I think, anticipated war, but instantly volunteered, and were sent by the overland road to the defence of the Alamo. We all know this incomparable, splendid deed of heroism. Little knew the bloody Santa Anna that as the smoke cleared and the ashes of the martyrs were blown hither and thither the radiant Lone Star arose to its place in the blue sky, and consecrated their memories forever. A few weeks later the splendid victory of San Jacinto was won by Houston, and his brave handful of soldiers. My father knew Houston well and voted for him when he ran for Governor of Tennessee.

My father was of a joyous nature and among my earliest recollections is his singing, in a rich mellow voice, as he ran down the piazza steps, "Hurrah! Hurrah! For the Good Old North State Forever!" a song written by Governor Gaston of North Carolina.

Father had a fine ear for music, played well on the violin, and sketched striking pictures. I think he had taste and aptitude for art, but neither studied nor prosecuted it. He also wrote poetry, but I have only one of his little poems.

He was a man in word and deed, in action as well as profession. "Peace to his memory," says his one surviving child, and I

believe that the millions that now claim Texas, beautiful Texas, as home will answer, Amen!

Micajah Autry left one son, James L. Autry, who became a colonel in the Confederate army, and was killed in his first battle, that of Murfreesboro, Tennessee. He was survived by a baby boy, now Judge James L. Autry, general attorney of the Texas Company, of Houston, Texas.

Mary, the only surviving child of Micajah Autry, now in her eighty-fifth year, was married to James Madison Greer on December 22, 1841, and had four sons, all of whom are living, and all of whom are lawyers. Their names and places of residence are as follows: James Micajah Greer, of Memphis, Tennessee; Hal Wyche Greer, Robert Autry Greer, and D. Edward Greer, of Beaumont, Texas. With them their mother makes her home. Writing on August 15, 1910, she says: "God has been good to me in that none of my descendants have died, even to the fourth generation, and all are apparently in good health up to this date."

Besides enjoying the distinction of being the daughter of an Alamo hero, probably the only woman now living who is so distinguished, she possesses talent of a high order. As a writer of history and verse, especially verse inspired by patriotic feeling, she is well known, and has attained prominence of a character that will endure. On one of the closing pages (924) of the Second Volume of the Life of Jefferson Davis, "A Memoir, written by his wife," are to be found some of the finest lines which the grandeur of his character, and the depth of his misfortunes called forth. They were written by Mrs. Mary A. Greer, then living in Mississippi, and are a graceful summing up of the causes of his failure. They also show in admirable form the grasp of mind which characterizes the writer who was born and trained to love and admire heroic virtues.

WILLIAM T. MALONE¹

G. A. MCCALL

The siege of the Alamo, its heroic defense, and the massacre of its valiant defenders are among the most notable events of Texas history. The incidents of the siege continue to arouse the most intense interest among all lovers of great deeds and heroic achievements. That "Thermopylae had its messenger of defeat but the Alamo had none" has become the pride not only of Texans, but of the whole English race as well. That these men, one hundred and eighty in number, should place themselves in the path of Santa Anna's army to stay his advance until an opposing force could be collected shows them to have been quite as devoted to their country and its preservation as were Leonidas and his Spartan band in the brave days of old. Any particulars concerning the life and death of any of the garrison of the Alamo will be of interest to all.

In 1835 there lived near Athens, Georgia, a planter by the name of Thomas Malone. His family was originally from Virginia. He had accumulated at this time quite a considerable fortune and was the father of several children. The oldest of these children, a young man with dark hair and complexion, was about eighteen years old, and was named William T. Malone. William was inclined to be wild and wayward but his father was a man of strict habits, looking upon dissipation with no lenient eye. One night the boy got too much in his cups with some of his convivial companions, and being ashamed to face his father after the spree, he fled from home, going to New Orleans, Louisiana. His father, anxious to save him hastened to New Orleans, trying to overtake him and to beg him to return to his sorrowing mother and family. When he reached the city his son had already gone, having taken passage on a boat for Texas. The father returned to the sorrow-

¹The facts of this sketch are obtained from the record of the case of *Malone et al. v. Moran et al.*, number 3644, on file in the district court of Parker county, Texas. The suit was filed November 4, 1899, and judgment was rendered April 13, 1901. Information is drawn chiefly from depositions of Mrs. Frank Malone, who then resided near Memphis, Tennessee, Ben F. Highsmith, who then lived in Uvalde county, Texas, and Professor F. P. Madden, who lived in Waco, Texas. All are now dead.